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ABSTRACT

There is a great need to increase the number of American Indian students in psychology, especially in clinical and counseling psychology. Nationally, there are fewer than 200 American Indian psychologists, and most mental health services for Indian people are provided by paraprofessionals, who may be poorly trained for this function. In addition, Indian people tend to experience more psychological problems than non-Indians, having higher rates of alcoholism, depression, and suicide. The lack of American Indian psychologists is a multifaceted problem, involving lack of cultural relevance of pathology-oriented models and lack of psychologist role models for prospective Indian students. The ability of university psychology programs to attract American Indian students is influenced by the small size and geographic concentration of the Indian population, the isolation of Indian students in rural areas and on reservations, student poverty, and biased admission criteria. Student recruitment efforts could be improved through the commitment and support of the entire psychology department, the recruitment of Indian faculty members, faculty travel to schools and tribal areas, advertisements in tribal publications, and establishment of an Indian student center on campus. Retention of Indian students in college could be improved by making reasonable accommodations for cultural differences, establishing support groups and mentoring relationships, and getting feedback from American Indian graduates. (Contains 28 references.) (SV)

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1999

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The Need for More American Indian Psychologists

There is a great need to increase the number of American Indian students in psychology, especially in clinical and counseling psychology. Nationally, there are fewer than 200 American Indian psychologists, and less than one percent of all psychologists are American Indian (Trimble & Bagwell, 1995). Since there are about two million American Indians (U. S. Census, 1990), this means that there is roughly one Indian psychologist for every 10,000 American Indians, which is less than one-fifth of the number of psychologists available in the general population (LaFromboise, 1988). Overall, ethnic representation in psychology, as reflected in graduate program enrollments and degree recipients, has not changed significantly in the past decade (Aponte, Rivers, & Wohl, 1995).

It has been estimated that about 80% of American Indian psychologists are involved in research, education, or administration rather than direct service, so it can be assumed that the vast majority of Indian people who seek psychological services receive them from non-psychologists who are also non-Indians (LaFromboise, 1988). Most mental health services for Indian people are provided by paraprofessionals, who may be poorly trained for this function. While there is little evidence to suggest that non-Indian mental health workers provide inadequate services to Indian people, it is obvious that Indian psychologists would often have some advantages over non-Indians. Besides their presumed deeper understanding of Indian culture, they would also likely have more credibility with Indian clients. They would tend to be more familiar with American Indian culture-bound syndromes and less likely to under-diagnose or over-diagnose Indian clients (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Although there are very few American Indian psychologists, Indian people tend to experience more psychological problems than non-Indians. The rate of alcoholism in Indian people is three times that of the general population, and Indian people are ten times more likely to die due to alcoholism (Services, 1989; Thomason, 1996a). The prevalence of depression and suicide is also much higher in Indian people. The suicide rate of Indian adults is over twice as high as that of the general population, and the rate of suicide of young adult Alaska Natives is ten times the national average (U. S. Congress, 1986). Although the problems are serious, it should be noted that the vast majority of Indian people are mentally healthy and most Indian people are not depressed, suicidal, or alcoholic. The point is that although the rate of such problems is higher in the Indian population than in the general population, there are many fewer Indian psychologists available to address the problems.

The lack of an adequate number of American Indian psychologists is a multifaceted problem. Due to the Euroamerican assumptions of modern psychology, some young Indian people may simply not be attracted to it as a career. Some may see it as too focused on pathology; some may object to its emphasis on the individual instead of the group; some may object to its emphasis on statistics, experimentation, and assessment. Clinical psychology is often seen as tied to the medical model and the use of a diagnostic manual which gives only minimal attention to cultural factors (the DSM-IV). Relatively little has been written on American Indian psychology, and almost nothing on what clinical psychology has to offer Indian people (Thomason, in press).

There are several relatively new approaches to clinical and counseling psychology which avoid some of the problems of the traditional medical

model, although these approaches may be less well known to people outside the field of psychotherapy. These brief therapies have much to offer multicultural clients who are seeking practical assistance. The strategic and solution-focused approaches emphasize helping clients find solutions to immediate concerns rather than focusing on psychopathology (deShazer, 1985; Fisch, Weakland, & Segal, 1982; Quick, 1996; Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1996). The solution-oriented approach has also been applied to alcoholism treatment (Berg & Miller, 1992). Some psychotherapeutic approaches with American Indians focus on groups and networks rather than on the individual (LaFromboise & Fleming, 1990). These less pathology-oriented approaches appear to have great promise for use with Indian and other multicultural populations.

Other reasons for the lack of Indian psychologists may be more directly related to educational factors. The number of ethnic students in graduate programs is often directly related to the number of ethnic faculty in the programs, and currently American Indian faculty account for less than one percent of all psychology faculty (Aponte, Rivers, & Wohl, 1995). The vast majority of psychology training programs at universities have no Indian faculty members, and this situation does not appear to be improving. Prospective Indian students have very few psychologist role models. In addition, becoming a psychologist requires entering a demanding educational program with a commitment of several years duration, and the income potential of psychologists is less than that of many other occupations which require a similarly rigorous and lengthy commitment, such as medicine and law.

The reasons for the under-representation of American Indians in psychology can provide some clues to improving the recruitment of Indian

student to psychology programs. As a field, psychology must do a better job of communicating to the public, and especially Indian and other multicultural young people, the benefits of a career in psychology. The major benefit is the opportunity to help people cope with and resolve their psychological problems, but the practice of psychology also provides a good standard of living and the chance for a stimulating, creative, and challenging career. If the profession of psychology demonstrates its cultural sensitivity to the unique needs and concerns of Indian people, more Indian students will be attracted to training programs in psychology.

Barriers to Attracting Indian Students to Psychology Programs

Several demographic and geographic factors have an impact on the ability of psychology training programs in universities to attract Indian students. One factor is the relatively small size of the Indian population. Given the fact that there are only about two million American Indians, the number of young Indian people who obtain Bachelor's of Art degrees and consider graduate school each year is very small. In 1990, only 9% of American Indians completed a college degree, compared to 20% of the total U. S. population (U. S. Census, 1992). These students have many potential career fields to consider, and the psychology programs are "competing" with other academic areas and with each other to attract Indian students. Some years, even psychology programs at universities in states with high Indian populations do not have a single Indian applicant.

Another important factor is the geographic concentration of Indian people in certain areas. More than half of the American Indian population lives in just six states: Oklahoma, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska, Washington, and North Carolina (U. S. Census, 1992). Such concentrations

can be problem for universities in other states because many Indian people prefer to stay as near their home as possible. White students seem to be much more likely to be willing to move a long distance from home, away from their family and support system, which are so important for most Indian people. Indian society is extremely close-knit, which is a strength in many ways, but it means that Indian students who move far from home may feel guilty about it and have more trouble adjusting than White students. Indian students from reservations may also need to travel back home frequently to care for relatives, assist members of their extended family, or participate in tribal ceremonies and celebrations.

Students in rural and reservations areas can be quite isolated and difficult to reach by standard recruitment methods. For example, on the Navajo Nation many homes lack electricity and telephones, and they may be many miles from the closest towns, cities, and universities. Contact by mail and telephone may be impossible or unreliable, so maintaining contact with prospective students can be a real challenge. On the other hand, about half of all Indian people live in urban areas (Stock, 1987), and they may be as easy to contact as any other students.

The educational attainment of Indian people has traditionally been somewhat limited by the lack of financial resources. Poverty can limit the quality of students' educational development, and make them less likely to pursue education beyond high school or college. In 1990, the median family income of Indian people was $21,750, and 31% of all Indian people were living below the poverty level. Over half of Indian people living on reservations were living below the poverty level (U. S. Census, 1992). However, many American Indian students are eligible for financial aid for

college and scholarships for graduate school, which helps overcome this barrier.

Admission criteria can be a barrier for some Indian students. Universities have the right to limit admission to students they think have the potential to succeed in their programs, but the criteria used should be unbiased and objective. For example, the use of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is an artificial barrier, since there is little relationship between GRE scores and success in graduate school (Williams, 1997). Even some relatively minor issues such as excessively high application fees can discourage some Indian students.

To some degree, faculty in psychology training programs in universities may feel they can safely ignore the Indian population as a pool of potential students. The reasoning is that the pool of potential applicants is tiny, they may be a long distance away, and they are hard to contact. Why not just focus recruitment efforts on members of more populous and more proximate ethnic groups, such as African Americans and Hispanics or Latinos? The answer to this question, of course, is that Indian psychologists are needed to meet the needs of Indian people who have psychological disorders. Recruiting and training Indian students is the right thing to do. No other reason should be necessary to justify an intensive effort to recruit Indian students to psychology training programs.

Recommendations for Improving Recruitment Efforts

Psychology departments can increase their attractiveness to Indian students by deciding to make this effort a priority. A process of self-examination and evaluation, possibly with the help of a consultant, can be followed by establishing a task force to address the issue. The specific goals,

objectives, methods, and timelines should be agreed to and put in writing. Such an effort requires the commitment of the entire department, and the support of the administration, and the effort is best seen as a continuous process rather than a quick fix. Two or three years of recruitment efforts may be required before they begin to show results. For example, it may be necessary to target college freshmen and sophomores to encourage them to major in psychology, as a prerequisite to attending graduate school in clinical or counseling psychology later.

The recruitment of American Indian faculty members would help provide role models, advisors, and mentors for potential Indian students. Granted, this can be a challenge, since doctoral level Indian psychologists are rare, and are actively recruited by many universities. After an Indian faculty member is on board, the department should be careful not to give that person all the responsibility for recruiting Indian students. To be successful, multicultural student recruitment is a task best shared by the entire department, and not limited to the multicultural faculty members.

Improving recruitment efforts need not require major financial outlays. There are some costs, but grants may be available to support recruitment and retention efforts. Costs can include travel for faculty to visit schools and tribal agencies, publication costs for brochures and advertisements, and possibly funding for scholarships. Fortunately, there are many forms of financial aid and scholarships available for Indian students (Thurber & Thomason, 1996). In fact, many of the scholarships available only to multicultural students go unawarded each year due to a lack of applicants. While faculty members should be aware of the main sources of aid for Indian students, the responsibility for helping students seek and find financial aid can rest with the financial aid officers at the university, assuming they have

had diversity training and are culturally sensitive to the needs of specific groups.

A listing of practical recommendations for improving recruitment efforts would be quite lengthy and is available elsewhere (Thomason, Thurber, & Tisdale, in press). However, an overview of recommended recruitment efforts can be described here. The main thrust of recruitment efforts should be in the areas of marketing, public relations, and communications. The challenge is to make Indian people who are prospective university students aware of the need for more Indian psychologists, the benefits of a career in psychology, and the availability of training programs at universities or professional schools. Recruitment methods differ as to their cost and effectiveness.

The easiest recruitment methods include advertisements in tribal newspapers and newsletters and printed brochures which can be distributed in a variety of ways. Advertisements placed in national Indian newspapers, such as Indian Country Today, reach thousands of Indian people every week. Such advertisements and brochures should be written in clear, simple language and perhaps with Indian-themed artwork to make them more attractive. To be most effective, the artwork should be tribe-specific and reviewed by a tribal member regarding its appropriateness. Copyright-free Indian clip art is readily available in books and computer files. For advertising to members of large tribes, such as the Navajo, it might be advantageous to have advertisements and brochures written in the tribal language, although most Indian young people speak English. Brochures and posters can be posted in reservation high schools, colleges, tribal buildings, recreation centers, and anywhere prospective students are likely to see them.

It should be noted that recruitment efforts should target adults as well as adolescents and young people.

Faculty recruiters can visit high schools and community colleges on reservations to talk to students about careers in psychology. There are also many career fairs, college fairs, powwows, and Indian events such as craft fairs where a university could have a booth for a small fee. One faculty member or student affairs staff member could sit at the booth and talk to prospective students. The goal would be to compile a list of interested prospective students so they can be sent more information later and invited to visit the campus.

While on campus, prospective students can meet with faculty and current Indian students, tour the campus, and meet with financial aid officers. Some universities have one day per term designated as an open house for prospective multicultural students to visit. While it is obviously most cost effective to have such events open to all multicultural students, faculty and staff should be sensitive to the different needs and values of the students, and some events limited to prospective Indian students may be appropriate.

Some universities have established an Indian Center and/or an Indian dormitory on campus so Indian students can meet socially and provide support for each other. Simply having an Indian Center will be a big attraction to many Indian students. Psychology departments may be able to designate a room in the building as an Indian Resource Center, with sofas, Indian artwork on the walls, and a wide selection of reading matter, including Indian newspapers, psychology journals and announcements. Such a room would show a real commitment to making Indian students feel accepted and comfortable.

The personal touch is especially important when working to recruit Indian students. Prospective students must get the clear sense that the university faculty and staff understand and value American Indian traditions and culture. Personal interactions must be culturally sensitive and appropriate (Thomason, 1996b). It may be necessary for university faculty and staff to receive training in cultural aspects of communication and interaction with Indian people. Faculty and staff who travel to reservations should work hard to establish working relationships with school teachers and counselors who can extend the recruiter's reach and assist with student contacts. Regular visits to reservation high schools and community colleges may be necessary to establish collegial relationships with school and college staff and faculty. Listings of American Indian tribes, agencies, and tribal colleges, with contact information, are available in directories (American Psychological Association, 1995; Thomason, 1995a). Information on how to make counseling services culturally appropriate is included in chapters by Thomason (1993; 1995b).

Recommendations for Improving Retention Efforts

As important as recruitment is, it does no good to recruit Indian students if they drop out of school before graduating. Intensive supportive services must be available to assist students in completing coursework and other requirements successfully. Universities have an obligation to teach multicultural students using culturally appropriate methods. For example, it is well known that different students have different learning styles. Students can adapt to teachers, but teachers must also adapt their practices to students. This can be a controversial topic, since some faculty members prefer the approach of being "colorblind" in terms of treating all students the same and having all students meet the same standards.

Increasingly, university faculty and staff are recognizing the advantages of valuing the diversity which multicultural students bring to the campus. Most university faculty and staff know that the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be made for students with disabilities who have special needs. Similarly, reasonable accommodations should be made for Indian and other multicultural students, who may speak English as a second language and differ in many ways from Whites. American Indians reared in reservation and rural areas grow up learning the traditional values, religion, non-verbal behavior and communication style of indigenous Indian culture, which is many thousands of years older than Euroamerican culture. Since these differences enrich American culture, Indian students should not have to totally reconstruct themselves in order to succeed in a Euroamerican university. It is reasonable to expect that both the Indian student and the university will have to make some adaptations to meet each other half-way.

Some of the recommendations for improving recruitment, such as having Indian faculty members and having an Indian Resource Center in the department, will also facilitate the retention of Indian students. An example of a reasonable accommodation for Indian students from a reservation is to allow them to return to the reservation as needed to attend ceremonies or deal with family issues. These absences might be seen similarly to absences other students take for religious reasons. Obviously, if the absences are excessive (as determined by instructors) the student can be encouraged to drop the course and take it again at a better time.

Another idea for improving retention is to establish a mutual support group for Indian students, who could meet regularly, either with or without faculty involvement. Separate meetings could be held regularly for faculty to

provide academic and career advisement. Help could be provided with negotiating the university bureaucracy, working with instructors, and brainstorming solutions to academic problems. Inservice training could help teachers learn how to teach Indian students in an effective and culturally appropriate manner (Reyhner, 1994; Rhodes, 1994). As with all students, tutoring and training in study skills should be readily available and should be provided by people with demonstrated competency in working with diverse populations.

Faculty can also work to provide mentoring relationships with new minority students. Personal interest and involvement on the part of faculty members is perhaps the single most important aspect of a student retention program. Indian students could be surveyed every semester regarding their satisfaction with the program, and responses to student suggestions could be provided regularly in meetings with students. Indian students who are having difficulty and considering dropping out should be contacted, and assistance should be offered to keep the student in school. Students who do drop out should be contacted and asked for feedback, to help prevent future dropouts.

American Indian graduates of the university should be surveyed to determine their satisfaction with their education, their current job, and so on. Such information could be written up and used as a motivator for current students (and also used in student recruitment). Some departments may choose to develop an advising guide specifically for Indian students, to address common concerns and questions. Such a guidebook could also make prospective students aware of the special programs and services available for Indian students at the university.

These are only a few suggestions for improving recruitment and retention efforts. Many of the ideas available in books and articles on general student recruitment can be adapted for use with Indian students. In addition, the American Psychological Association (1997) has published several helpful guides to promote ethnic minority recruitment in psychology. Regarding the recruitment and retention of American Indian students, the problem is not a lack of ideas, but rather a lack of commitment and determination to remedy the problem. As more people become aware of the problem and the availability of solutions, perhaps real progress will be made.

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